

CONGRATS TO ...

J.K. Simmons, who snagged an Oscar for Best Supporting Actor shortly after the last issue of *State of the Arts* went to press. In his acceptance speech, he told the audience, “Call your mom, call your dad. If you’re lucky enough to have a parent or two alive on this planet, call ‘em. Don’t text, don’t email. Call them on the phone. Tell them you love them and thank them and listen to them for as long as they want to talk to you. Thank you. Thank you, Mom and Dad.” His dad was UM School of Music professor Don Simmons and his mom was longtime arts advocate and former Montana Arts Council staffer Pat Simmons; they died in 2012 and 2014 respectively. Simmons claimed the Academy Award for his role as an over-the-top jazz instructor in “Whiplash,” making him the first UM alumni and second Montanan to win an Oscar. Gary Cooper was the first for his role in 1952’s “High Noon.”

Three Montanans who were among the songwriters, authors and broadcast entertainers honored at the 2015 Western Heritage Awards, April 17-18 at the National Cowboy and Western Heritage Museum in Oklahoma City. The **Montana Historical Society Press** and authors **Jennifer Bottomly-O’Looney** and **Kirby Lambert** claimed an award for Outstanding Art Book for *Montana’s Charlie Russell: Art in the Collection of the Montana Historical Society*. The handsome hardcover book features high-resolution reproductions of all 230 Russell artworks in the Montana Historical Society collection. Conrad cowboy and yodeler extraordinaire **Wylie Gustafson** and his band, **The Wild West**, won Outstanding Original Western Composition for “Where Horses Are Heroes.” The tune is part of *Song of the Horse*, a new compilation of 21 horse-themed songs that Wylie and The Wild West have recorded over the past 20 years. Gustafson described the honor as “the most prestigious award we can get” to Jake Sorich at bigskystatebuzz.com. “I’ve attended the award show ceremony as a presenter a couple of times but this has been one of the awards that has eluded us for a long time. I guess finally persistence has paid off.” Gustafson – the cowboy behind Yahoo’s trademark yodel – also led 3,432 employees in a record-breaking yodel March 2 during the company’s 20th anniversary celebration at its headquarters in Sunnyvale, CA. The minute-long yodel broke the Guinness World Record for World’s Largest Simultaneous Yodel. Check it out at www.youtube.com.



Wylie Gustafson



Marianne Adams

Marianne Adams, education director at Grandstreet Theatre in Helena, who has been nominated for a Tony Award for Excellence in Theatre Education by her current and former students and colleagues. Adams received her BFA in Theatre Arts from the University of Nebraska at Kearney. At Grandstreet, she has directed many main-stage productions, including “The 25th Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee,” “Big River,” “Ragtime,” “Annie,” “Peter Pan,” “Into the Woods,” “Oliver,” and “Songs for a New World.” She teaches acting classes for the theatre school and has worked as a mentor

and artist-in-residence in the Helena Public Schools and surrounding areas. “She was the first one that showed me a life in the theatre was really possible,” said one student. “She teaches compassion – it’s kind of this lifelong lesson,” said another. The winning teacher will receive the inaugural Excellence in Theatre Education Award at the 2015 Tony Awards on June 7, and be acknowledged on the CBS telecast.

DJ **Lonnie Bell** of Billings, who was inducted into the Montana Cowboy Hall of Fame on Feb. 8. Bell is also a member of the Country Radio DJ Hall of Fame and the Montana Radio Hall of Fame. A native of West Virginia, he began playing guitar at age 8 and had his first radio gig in Hawaii on station KAHU. During his long career as a performer and DJ, he’s met, performed with, and introduced a slew of country artists, including Loretta Lynn, Merl Travis, Lefty Frizzell and Charley Pride. At 90, he’s still on the air at 8 a.m. each Sunday, playing classic country on KGHL-AM 790.

Great Falls High School graduate **Reggie Watts**, who was named bandleader for “The Late Late Show with James Corden,” which launched in late March. The comedian and musician, who appears regularly on TV, radio and stage, told a reporter at the *Fresno Bee* that he plans “create a different presence” on the show to back the British-born host, who takes over the late-night slot from Craig Ferguson. “The music’s going to be improvised ... And we’ll probably incorporate the band in different ways,” Watts said. “It’ll be more about energy than anything technical.”

Butte music educator **Ruth Rotondi**, who was honored for her outstanding contributions to music teaching by the Music Teachers National Association at its recent conference in Las Vegas. Rotondi, a nationally certified teacher of music, was born in 1923 in Brooklyn, N.Y. She attended Oberlin College, where she majored in political

science, minored in music and gave a senior recital in 1945 at the Music Conservatory at Oberlin. She earned a certificate in piano pedagogy from the Diller-Quaile School of Music, where she also taught piano. She later moved to Butte and joined the Montana State Music Teachers Association, serving as competitions chair, foundation chair and historian. She served two terms as president of her local association and is currently its secretary, and has twice been named MSMTA Teacher of the Year.



Ruth Rotondi (Montana Standard photo)

The three winners of the statewide Young Artists Competition, sponsored by the Montana Association of Symphony Orchestras. The Junior Division winner is cellist **David Harmsworth** of Bonner, performing Lalo’s *Concerto in D minor*; he’s been studying the cello for 10 years. Bassoonist **Edin Agamenoni** of Great Falls won the Senior Division performing Weber’s *Concerto in F*; Edin has been playing the bassoon for five years. Violinist **Emily Young** won the College Division performing Barber’s *Concerto Op. 16*; she’s been playing the violin for 16 years and is a student at the University of British Columbia. All three division winners, selected during a showcase Jan. 17 in Bozeman, will appear as soloists with at least one of the major orchestras in Montana. “I am very excited about the future of Montana’s orchestras,” said Billings Symphony Director Anne Harrigan. “The talent showcased at the MASO competition was second to none.”

Hellgate High School’s Wind Ensemble of Missoula, which was selected to perform at Carnegie Hall during the 2015 World Projects New York Wind Band Festival in March. The event includes workshops, rehearsal exchanges and visits to cultural landmarks. “To have the opportunity to play at Carnegie is an amazing, once-in-a-lifetime experience,” said ensemble director Leon Slater.



Vera Brunner-Sung

had its world premiere at the International Film Festival Rotterdam in 2014, and received the George C. Lin Emerging Filmmaker Award at the 15th San Diego Asian Film Festival. The film is touring Montana this spring; for more information, visit www.bellavistafilm.com.

Filmmaker **Vera Brunner-Sung** of Missoula, who was awarded a 2015 Center for Asian American Media Fellowship, which provides mentorship opportunities with leading Asian-American talent in film, television and digital media. Brunner-Sung’s feature film, “Bella Vista,” produced by Montanans **Jeri Rafter** and **Brooke Swaney**,

Swan Valley artist **Russ Abolt**, whose sculpture created to commemorate firefighters will be installed in May at the Missoula Smokejumper Base. Abolt created his sculpture five years ago, using a chunk of charred wood he had picked up while hiking through Mann Gulch in the Gates of the Mountains Wilderness – the site of a fire that claimed the lives of 13 firefighters in 1949. Abolt combined the blackened tree heart with a piece of desert juniper he had picked up from Arizona. “This represents this awful experience of young men being trapped and lost,” said the sculptor. “It is a characterization of agony.” The sculpture was placed on a large rock in Abolt’s Imagination Garden, a sculpture park he created on his property in the Swan Valley. He wrote a memorial to fallen firefighters that he printed on a plaque and fixed to the rock. The sculpture resonated with local Forest Service firefighters, who eventually helped Abolt find a home for it at the Smokejumper Base. The piece “evokes emotion about the risk of being a firefighter, the reality of the sacrifice that you make and thoughts of those who have lost their lives on the fire line,” said Katie Knotek, Public Information Officer (PIO) on the Condon Mountain Fire of 2012. “It is a very powerful piece. It has a great connection to the past honoring fallen firefighters,” said Operations Foreman of the Missoula Smokejumper Base Tory Kendrick. “Firefighters will remember that lesson every time they walk past the sculpture.”

– From the from the *Seeley Swan Pathfinder*, Nov. 27, 2014

Kevin Red Star will show his work June 3-Sept. 30 at Galerie Orenda in Paris in a show titled “Shields, Drums and Masks.” He’s also the subject of a new book, *Kevin Red Star: Crow Indian Artist*, published in 2014. The large-format, hardcover book was written by Daniel Gibson, who served as the editor of *Native Peoples* magazine from 2001–2013, with photography by Kitty Leaken. The book features reproductions of Red Star’s best work over his 50-year career, historic photos of the Crow people and their culture, and contemporary images of the artist, his family and his working environment. “Red Star’s contemporary style – part abstract, part representational and wholly unique – along with his vibrant colors combine in images that convey a deep love for his subject matter: traditional Crow Indian culture,” writes Gale Courey Toensing in *Indian Country Today*.

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Send us your good news

Artists, writers, musicians, arts educators and arts administrators: Please let us know about major awards and accomplishments, especially beyond the borders of Montana.

Send your good news to Congrats, c/o *Lively Times*, 33651 Eagle Pass Trail, Charlo, MT 59824; or email: writeus@livelytimes.com.

If you include a digital photo, please make sure it’s at least 200 lines per inch (lpi or dpi) and a file size of over 500kb.



Sculpture by Russ Abolt heads for its new home at the Missoula Smokejumper Base.

(Photo by Colleen Kesterson/Seeley Swan Pathfinder)

Congrats compiled by Kristi Niemeyer for State of the Arts